

LAVELLE RODERICK DONOVAN
MEMORIES OF THE RODERICK RANCH ON MAGNOLIA AVENUE

My recollection of being on a 10 acre Chicken ranch during 1917 to 1935. It was a chicken ranch way out on Magnolia Avenue just beyond Horn Avenue: The Roderick Ranch a Mom/Pop ranch.

Owners: Frank and Martha Roderick (both now deceased)

Kids: Wayne Roderick - Orinda, CA

Lavelle (Roderick) Donovan - Penngrove

Dad ran about 5,000 laying hens, but it was work to keep this number to full capacity. Our laying hens were kept in 3 large houses which were attached to large, fenced yards with small doors and ramps in the sides of the houses so the hens could go in or out at will. Their water was obtained by their sticking their heads through a long slit cut in the side of the hen house and water troughs, with medication in the water, hung on the outside of the hen house. The lumber for these houses was bought when the Cotati Speedway was torn down. These hen houses had to be cleaned periodically either by dad or sometimes he would hire it done. The fertilizer was sold to vegetable farmers. After the houses were cleaned, they were sprayed to kill any vermin and to disenfect.

Now and then, we took delivery of day old, unsexed baby chicks from a Petaluma hatchery. They came in cardboard boxes. Dad had prepared the brooder house by cleaning, spraying and putting new straw all over the floor. The brooder stoves were going full blast so the brooder house would be warm to receive these chicks just out of the hatchery boxes. A fun job for us kids was to take these chicks out of the hatchery boxes and put them around the brooder stoves on the fresh straw on the floor. Here they stayed until daylight. We chased them

around the stoves every night. During the day they ate mash and baby chick food. They were kept in ^{side} this brooder house till they were 2 to 3 weeks old; and then allowed outside to run around in their own yard during the day and we kids had to chase them inside their house at night. They were eating all this time but not producing.

At ten weeks they were graded, vaccinated, and moved to a larger house. The fryers went to market for meat birds and we kept the pullets to raise to maturity for egg production. We kids had to help with this long and hot job. Now these young pullets started to lay pee-wee eggs, which had no market value, but we used them in cooking.

Now and then, the older hens were culled for producing stock and the non-producing stock sold to chicken dealers for chicken soup. These eliminated older hens were replaced by the younger pullets, which had reached maturity by now and were laying full-sized eggs.

All the chicken ranches were to the north or to the west of Petaluma. All food for the chickens were mostly grain, mash or greens. No matter how hard a rancher tried to combat the rats, they still infested the country side as the chicken feed called in the rats in droves. The poisons we used to combat rat invasion then were not like the poisons of today.

Chickens were moved in coops. The chicken coops were 3'x 5' and 14" high; wooden frames with chicken wire nailed to the frames; wooden floor; and 2 gates in the top that slid back and forth in order to take chickens in or out of coop. Each coop was divided in half by a partition and each side held 12 hens or 20 fryers.

Each chicken rancher had his own formula as to the mixture of grain he used. I can remember only 3 grains my father used: Wheat,

barley and milo maize--but he might have used more grains. He would pour sacks of these grains together into a big bin built in our barn and dad mixed them with a short handled scoop shovel. The empty burlap sacks were saved and sold to a sack dealer.

The greens for the chickens were kale or a low vine called rape which was cut with a scythe. I can still see my father in the kale patch picking the kale leaves from the plant and tucking said leaf under his arm until he collected a bunch under his arm; then he would take the bunch of leaves and drop the said leaves in a burlap sack he had tied to his waist and dragged it along with him. These kale leaves were taken to the barn where the kale cutter would chop them up for greens for the chickens.

Barges brought oyster shells up the Petaluma River to the feed mills who would grind them up and mix them up with the mash. These oyster shells were supposed to make the hens lay eggs with stronger shells.

Vaccine and water medication to combat Coccidiosis and New castle diseases were purchased at the Poultry Pharmacy on Main St. Here also could be purchased celluloid chicken rings in different colors which a rancher could slip on the leg of a hen. Each chicken rancher had his own color code and he could tell any data re his flock according to his code.

Chicken ranchers had the idea that the longer a hen's day, the more eggs she would lay; so all hen houses had lights so long winter evenings and early mornings could be turned into days by turning the lights on and fooling the chickens. The country-side looked like a city at night and early morning because of lighted hen houses. Dad

fixed the back handle of an old alarm clock by welding a lever on this handle. When the alarm went off at an early, morning hour, the welded lever would go around and flip the light switch, turning on the lights in the hen houses while dad was still comfortable in bed.

One of us kids' favorite sports was to hunt rats with our ranch dogs: Spot, a stout Fox Terrior, and Maggie, a bird dog with large paws and unknown pedigree. All we kids needed to say to the dogs "lets go hunt rats" and we were all off to the nearest hen house. Under the high end of the hen house would be piles of empty troughs where dad had stored them. Rates liked to burrough holes in the dirt under these troughs, where they lived. We would move the trough and let the dogs go at it. First, Maggie, with her big paws, would dig down the hole a ways and then let Spot into smell down the hole. If they weren't close enough to the rat, Maggie would take over and dig the hole deeper. Spot would remain close enough for the kill. When we kids got tired and we had gotten enough rats for one day, we would call it quits for the day; and Maggie would put all the dead rats in a pile, heads all the same direction, and dad would pick them up with a shovel.

Every afternoon at 3:30 was feeding time and egg gathering time. Dad would hitch the farm horse to a wagon with sacks of grain to take out to the chicken houses to feed the hens. The whole family would each have a large bucket in which we would gather the eggs for the nests. The full buckets of eggs were loaded on the wagon and hauled back to the egg house. In later years, we were more modern and had a model-T flat bed truck.

The eggs were hauled to the egg house, with a dirt floor for coolness, where they were packed in wooden cases the next day. These cases were divided in half and held 30 dozen eggs. First, a cardboard flat would be put in the bottom of the case. This flat held 3 dozen eggs; and when that flat was full, we would cover the 3 dozen eggs with another flat and fill it. We kept doing this until both sides of the case were full. The eggs had to be cleaned with sand paper and graded before they were put in the case. If we were in doubts to the size of the egg, we would put it on a little tin scale which weighed the egg; if the scale went down, we knew the egg was of regular size; but if the scale remained upright, we knew the egg was under sized. We had 2 cases going; one for regular sized and one for under sized. Dad did not join the Poultry Producers, so we sold our eggs to Casperson Egg Dealers who came to the ranch 3 times a week to pick up our cases of eggs.

Dad always milked 3 cows. He would run the day's milk through the separator and the skimmed milk would go in one container for the pigs' food and to the other container would get the cream to sell to the Co-op creamery. However, milk and cream used in the house came directly from the milk bucket and the cow, not from the separator. Pans of this milk were allowed to sit in out kitchen and the cream would rise to the top as the milk cooled, and mother would skim off the cream. This cream was used in coffee, to make butter, whipped cream, etc. The rest of the milk was poured into a pitcher for drinking and cooking.

Dad also raised pigs to sell and to eat; and we would do our own butchering. We also raised rabbits, turkeys and ducks. We would buy

a 1/2 of beef; so we had a good supply of meat. There were no refrigs. or freezers in houses in those days so we rented a freezer locker in a cold storage place in Petaluma (Western Refrig. Co., at "d" and Bridge Sts.) where our meat remained frozen.

We had a huge vegetable garden and a few fruit trees and berries. I can still remember picking heaps of string beans; and digging in the potato field and hunting for the dug potatoes in the sandy soil. We picked fresh tomatoes right off their vines to eat at meal time. We bought lugs of pears, peaches and apricot, in season, which mom would can; Fresh Cherries and apples we picked ourselves in farmers' orchards, and she made jelly from the berries.

We bought sugar and flour each in 100 lb. sacks and emptied them in their bins in the kitchen. The empty cotton sacks were washed, bleached, and hemmed for dish towels. Some of the sugar was used to make jelly ^{FROM} our own berries. The flour and our own lard (rendered from the fat when we butchered a pig) were made into pies.

Our cooking facilities consisted of a wood stove, with oven, for winter use a large, propane hot plate for summer cooking; and a large wood stove for heating the house during the winter months.

Sometimes we would buy a block of ice in Petaluma, chop it into pieces when we got it home and make ice cream in a wooden freezer with a crank. We would also buy a watermelon and put it on ice.

Longer, winter evenings were spent listening to the radio programs, as there was no TV in those days. We enjoyed Amos⁺Andy. Fibber Magee, Jack Benny, Ed^x Sullivan, One man's Family, etc. Dad subscribed to farm papers and magazines which were also geared to family activities. We also bought the Sunday Examiner.

We went to Petaluma every Saturday morning for banking, groceries and errands, and visiting with friends who we happened to encounter on the streets or in the stores.

Our well was near the house with a pump at ground level to pump water from the well to a big, round, wooden tank which rested on a frame work, to raise this tank about 20 feet up in the air. This height created the gravity needed for the water to flow into our house, hen houses and for irrigation. However, something was always wrong with the pump: the belt was broken, the motor on the pump was burnt out or something else was wrong.

We were on a private telephone line owned by Mr. Gugliametti and his maintenance man was Mr. Carl Unger. Our phone was on the wall with 2 bells on the front and a crank on the side to call "central" at the telephone office in Petaluma. Our number was 44F4 which told "central" to ring 4 short rings on the 44F line. As there were 11 parties on our line, and rings for any of our neighbors sounded on all the 11 parties on the line, we always knew when one neighbor got a phone call as the bells sounded on all 11 phones on the 44F line: 1 short plus 1 long was for one party; 2 shorts plus 1 long ring; was for some other neighbor on the 44F line. When our house had a call, we were not to tie up the line too long. We were also cautioned not to listen in on other parties conversations. Of course, this courtesy was not always observed. THERE WAS NO PAC. TEL. & TEL in those days.

Our family car was a 1922 Reo open touring car with imitation, black leather side curtains with issenglass windows, to keep wind and rain out. We used this car to visit relatives in San Francisco now and then. It took over 2 hours to drive from Petaluma to Sausalito

over the old Corte Madera grade, and 23 minutes on the ferry over to San Francisco.

Mon and dad took us swimming at Boyes Hot Springs quite often. We started the trip to Sonoma by driving past all the hay fields on the flat land east of Petaluma where now there are subdivisions and houses.

Many Sundays during the summer months were spent with picnics at the beach. There always was a crowd of relatives and friends, with a potluck dinner at noon--a fun day. We stayed at the beach a little longer than scheduled and chickens were fed a little later on those Sundays.

Dad enjoyed people to visit us as chicken ranching kept us close to home; so we always had lots of company on holidays and Sundays. We always had relatives for holiday dinners.

We kids spent our first 6 years of school at Wilson school; we then went on the school bus to Petaluma Jr. High and to Petaluma High. We both graduated from Petaluma High--Wayne in 1940 and I in 1935.

PETALUMA HISTORICAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

Oral History Program

Narrator Personal Information Questionnaire

Name DONOVAN LAUELLE MARIE RODERICK
 Last First Middle (Maiden)

Address 5736 OLD REDWOOD HWY PENNGROVE
P.O. Box 138 " 94951

Marital status: Married ☒ Single ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐

Birthdate 11-14-17 Birthplace PETALUMA

Length of residence in Petaluma (or Sonoma County) WHOLE LIFE

Education: Elementary school WILSON GRAMMAR SCHOOL

Secondary school PETALUMA JUNIOR HIGH AND HIGH SCHOOL
 Grad

College ☐ Grad ☐

Other ☐

Occupation(s) or former occupations(s) OFFICE CLERK AND HOUSEWIFE
DEPT OF MOTOR VEHICLES SANTA ROSA AND PETALUMA

Travels ORIENT MEXICO EUROPE IRELAND QUEBEC

Organizations, clubs REBEKAHS

CORONA CLUB AT ONE TIME

Other special interests READING TV

Additional comments

THANK YOU!

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Oral History Program
Family History Questionnaire

	Name	Birthdate	Birthplace	Deceased? Date
	FRANK RODERICK	1890	PETALUMIT	1955 (?)
Parents*	MARTHA ALBUSH "	1908	COLORADO	1989
# FRANK'S PARENTS CAME FROM BOSTON AND ORIGINALLY FROM THE AZORES				
Brothers & Sisters	WAYNE	1920	PETALUMIT	
Grand-parents*				
MOTHER'S PARENTS : CHRIS AND MARY ALBUSH				
Spouse	CHESTER DONOVAN	1912	SAN FRANCISCO	
Children	PATRICK	1941	" "	
Grandchildren				

*Please include maiden name of mother and grandmothers.

THANK YOU!

PETALUMA HISTORICAL MUSEUM
Oral History Program

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PLACE Penningsville

DATE 8-15-90

Lorelle M. Donnan
(Interviewee)

Maxine Devery
(for the Petaluma Historical Museum)

THANK YOU!